

Why This Waste?

Watchman Nee

“And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” ~ Mark 14:3-9

Paul reminds us that those who believe on Christ should live a *risen life*. He says,

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth ...” (Colossians 3:1).

We live on the earth at present. We walk on earth's streets. We live in material houses, built of stones, bricks, or wood. We eat earth's fruits, gathering our food from earth's fields, orchards and gardens. We wear clothes woven of earthly fabrics. We adorn our homes with works of art that man's hands make. We engage in the business of earth. We find our happiness in the things of this life.

But there will be a life after this. We call it heaven. We cannot see it. There is never a rift in the sky through which we can get even a glimpse of it. We have in the Scriptures hints of its beauty, its happiness, its blessedness. We know it is a world without sorrow, without sin, without death. Paul's teaching is that the Christian, while living on the earth, ought to begin to live this heavenly life.

Here we are in our earthly state. After this will come the heavenly condition. *“Those things which are above”* belong to this higher, spiritual life. But the Christian is exhorted to seek these higher things while living in this lower world. We belong to heaven, although we are not yet living in heaven. ... But now, while we are here on earth ... we are to seek those things which are above, where Christ is.

Paul presents the same truth in another form when he says,

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

We are in this world, but we do not belong here. We are only strangers, pilgrims. We travel abroad. We visit cities, looking upon beautiful things, charmed by what we see, but we are only tourists. Something tugs at our hearts continually – it is home. So while we still live in this world we are citizens of heaven. Christ is our King (I Timothy 1:17). We owe him our allegiance, our obedience. We are to seek those things which are above, where Christ is.

Nothing that is unloving is found there. God is love, and only love can live where God is. The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is a little earthly vision of some things that are above. It tells how the inhabitants live together.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

Love is one of the things that are above where Christ is ... which we, as Christians, should always seek in our present life.

In saying that we should do the things of the heavenly life in this earthly life, we are not to infer that the common work of this world is unworthy. We use the words “secular” and “spiritual” sometimes in a way that disparages what we call secular. We talk about the secular affairs of a good man, or of a church, as if they were not sacred, at least as if they were of a lower order than certain other kinds of work which we call “spiritual.” We need to guard ourselves carefully in making such distinctions, lest we do dishonor to men or women who do as holy and as worshipful service in their common, daily task-work, as they could do if their lives were devoted to “spiritual service.”

The Scripture says not a word against what we call secular business. Jesus did not ask that his disciples should be taken out of the world – he asked rather that they should stay in the world, and that they should be kept from the world’s evil. It is as much a duty to earn one’s daily bread as it is to pray.

The holiest duties of earth are oftentimes found in places which seem unheavenly. It is the

heart that makes any service sacred or reverent. One may be a bootblack,¹ and please Christ better, get greater blessing, be a better citizen of heaven, than another who is a “minister of the gospel,” busy with insistent duties. We must never forget that the Son of God came to earth and spent thirty years in what we would thoughtlessly call secular work. While he wrought at his carpenter’s bench, his heart was in the holy of holies. He was in communion with the Father all the while he was toiling with the axe, hammer and saw. Let no one call the carpenter work of Jesus unholy – it was pleasing to His Father.

When we seek to do the things that are above, where Christ is, most of us find the bulk of our occupation in common tasks and duties. Tomorrow we shall have to rise early and go to our business, and there will be no dishonor, no irreverence in our most diligent devotion to these tasks and occupations.

It may seem an impossible life to which this message calls us, but no divine command ever calls one to an impossibility. ... Seek the things that are above where Christ is, and your life will grow here into the beginnings of heavenliness as the days pass.

The Wider Life (1908)

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1. Somebody who cleans shoes: especially formerly, a person who cleans people’s shoes in the street.” *Encarta World English Dictionary*.

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